

I'd like to express concern and yes, outrage, at the lack of openness on the critically important issue of media ownership rules.

The experience of radio consolidation has proven a disaster, and given the lie to Chairman Powell's contention that the internet and other technology can, alone, provide a real alternative to diverse ownership of newspapers, cable networks and broadcast stations.

The most immediate result of weaker ownership rules and consolidation will be to gut local news coverage -- does anyone truly believe that a stand-alone local-content website will arise to challenge a local news monopoly? Say, a monopoly owned by Cox here in Atlanta?

In the long term, fewer owners means fewer programmers means less diverse programming means a weaker democracy. To maintain any semblance of real choice for viewers/readers/listeners, the only alternative to strict ownership rules is a regime of regulations controlling the minutae of programming -- do the libertarians supporting this measure really prefer that?

Rather than return to the fairness doctrine and regular licensing requirements, we simply need to ensure that a wide range of people and companies control our media outlets, and the free market will take care of the rest.

It's my strong feeling that ownership limits should be lowered -- made stricter -- not weakened. But at the least, the FCC needs to to delay action until it has received a full public comment.

Chairman Powell's refusal to hold full-fledged public hearings, and refusal to delay the June 2 vote, are a bitter disgrace. Does he not comprehend that his agency represents the public, the public that owns the airwaves? That it is supposed to protect the public good, and defend our interests? His obtuseness is a dereliction of duty.

Commissioners Copps and Adelstein are to be praised for holding hearings on their own, but it's a disgrace that they should be forced into this position. The other members of the commission are inviting a revolt by the American people, in which I should gladly take part.

Sincerely,
Caleb Hellerman